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## LITTLE JOURNEYS INTO MOSSLAND

### II.—A FEBRUARY THAW

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The winter which followed my first acquaintance with *Dicranella* and *Catharinaea* was a severe one. The mantle of snow long lay deep and protective over bank and hillside, and the woods were hushed, save for the subdued twitter of the juncos, or the occasional chatter of the squirrels far overhead in the branches of the oaks. The valley of the Wissahickon extended in frozen beauty. The stream was changed into ice, which was dark green like the surrounding hemlocks and along the driveway great ribbed icicles depended from the rocks. The tinkle of sleighbells often resounded there in the short afternoons of January.

In mid-February came a great thaw. For several days rain fell intermittently from dark, lowering skies. Town and country were deluged with slush. Then, one morning, the sun broke through the clouds and spread warm golden beams over all the earth. The air was like a breath of spring. Pulling on a pair of sturdy arctics it was little more than a half hour's journey to the Wissahickon Creek. The decaying ice of the stream, here and there broken, was submerged. Still there was plenty of snow, but enough had thawed or been washed away to expose many a mossy bank. What a Mecca for the bryologist and what a treat for the lover of the beautiful! My mind's eye this day beholds the golden green of *Cirriphyllum Boscii*, which used to be included in the important genus *Eurynchium*. The swollen stems of this pleurocarpous species had been inexpressibly freshened by the rain and warm atmosphere and peeped out at the edge of the snow like a miniature low-lying arboretum of exotic evergreens. Neither before nor since have I seen greater beauty in this *Cirriphyllum* which I came to know that day for the first time.

Then, too, here and there in bare spots the now pale green pin-cushions of *Leucobryum glaucum* studded the thawing snow. When we microscopically examine these leaves we better understand how the thin layer of chlorophyll overspread with tissue shows plainly when the plant is moist and the overlying tissue is transparent, but how the plant appears white when the tissue is dry and consequently opaque. In company with *Leucobryum* were larger clumps of the broom fork moss, *Dicranum scoparium*, with glossy secund leaves. Some of us remember this *Dicranum* in our boyhood—long before we knew its proper name—gracing the space beneath our Christmas tree, with bits of glass among the clumps of moss to look like pools, and on these bits of glass toy ducks, a sight which filled our childish eyes with pleasure.

That day three common species of *Mnium* were at their aesthetic best in vegetative luxuriance, although their sporophytes were but spears, lacking two months to maturity. *Mnium cuspidatum*, here the commonest, displayed dainty stolons with broad leaves characterized by serrations passing halfway down the margin; while the larger *Mnium affine ciliare*, with sometimes clustered fruit, also stoloniferous in growth, showed long marginal teeth prominent

under the handlens, down to the very base of the leaves. The entire-bordered leaf of *Mnium punctatum*, which was evident on only one bank, served as an introduction to this third species.

How fascinating were the perpendicular rocks, which even in midsummer drip with the water from springs! Behind the ice, like those objects the geologists have found encased in amber, appeared the hepatics: *Marchantia polymorpha*, showing behind the glassy covering the gemmae cups, whose biscuit-shaped bodies awaited distribution; and *Conocephalum conicum*, that other species which even under the handlens so well exhibits the air pores—those primitive stomata—resembling tiny craters. Behind this ice the water constantly flowed downward, the elongated air-bubbles appearing like tadpoles, ever wiggling their way in amazing sinuosities.

The base of other banks, laid bare, displayed unbroken masses of another hepatic, *Pellia epiphylla*, the globular spore-cases already visible at the edge of the thallus and the whole plant at this season clad in a hue of decided red. This assumption of a deep maroon color in winter would be a pretty problem for the physiological botanist and is only one of the many which might engage a bryologist keen for research work.

Again, already like old friends, *Dicranella* and *Catharinea* clothed many a bank, and, in moist crevices showing abundant spears of the developing sporophytes with deep red setae, was *Pohlia nutans*, that oft-present species so many times proving its identity by the serrate borders of the slender leaves when the beginner thinks he may have collected a rare *Bryum*.

But over all this world of mosses the sun emanated the dominant charm—our luminary who had been so chary of showing himself during the previous weeks. The lungs expanded with the intoxication of the vernal air, and the eyes were dazzled with contrasts of green and gold and white, sowing pictures of striking changing colors among this lovely valley of a thousand trickling thaw-made streamlets. And, in the later afternoon, when the sunbeams were growing slant, in a cozy little rift among the mossy rocks, *Bartramia pomiformis*, then first found, to be known ever afterward as a true friend, saluted the departing wayfarer with its soft pale-green cushions covered with the tiny green apples of the swelling though quite immature sporophytes. Worthy plant to commemorate our worthy John Bartram, one of the earliest botanists of Philadelphia—a fitting discovery to conclude the delightful bryological experiences of that warm February day which was a harbinger of other balmier days to come in the enchanting Maytime when the capsules of that same *Bartramia* would be mature, to scatter their spores and perpetuate the beauty of this delicate species as well as the memory of that estimable Friend, whose former abode and gardens may still be visited beside the Schuylkill River in West Philadelphia.

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